

# United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
MEDFORD DISTRICT OFFICE  
3040 BIDDLE ROAD  
MEDFORD, OREGON 97504

## ***FREE & EASY 2 FOREST MANAGEMENT PROJECT*** **DECISION RECORD #2 / RATIONALE / FONSI**

### **I. BACKGROUND**

The October 22, 2001 Decision Record / FONSI (DR) for the Free & Easy 2 Forest Management Project included the decision to use a slashbuster machine to reduce fuel loadings and fire hazard on five units (totaling approximately 68 acres) where commercial thinning / harvesting was to be implemented. These units were included in the Free and Easy 2 timber sale which was offered in November 2001. No bids were received at the timber sale offering, however, and the timber sale decision was subsequently withdrawn.

The October 22, 2001 Decision Record also addressed the use of the slashbuster on an additional six units totaling approximately 333 acres. The DR stated that the decision regarding the use of the slashbuster on these units would not be made until the public had an opportunity to review and comment on the October 15, 2001 addendum to the environmental assessment (EA) which addressed the proposed slashbuster use. This comment period was held in October - November 2001. No comments were received from the public addressing the addendum or the proposed change to treating fuels with a slashbuster machine.

### **II. DECISION**

This decision supplements the decisions documented in the October 22, 2001 Free & Easy 2 DR/FONSI.

#### **A. EA Addendum #3**

The changes proposed in EA Addendum #3 (May 15, 2002) are accepted and will be implemented. The seasonal operating requirements will be changed as noted. The purpose of this change is to lengthen the operating season while mitigating the potential impacts to songbirds.

Prescribed broadcast burning after the slashbuster treatment will be implemented as proposed. A high priority will be placed on prompt post-treatment burning in the areas where *Ceanothus cuneatus* is the dominate shrub species.

## B. Precommercial Thinning Prescription change

The precommercial thinning prescription for Unit 25-2 was initially targeted with an average residual tree spacing of 14'. This spacing will be increased to an average spacing of 16'.

## C. Slashbuster use

The decision is to implement the slashbuster fuel reduction treatments proposed in the October 15, 2001 Free & Easy EA addendum to the extent shown in attached Table DR2-1 and Map DR2-1. (*Note: The slashbuster treatment areas shown on Map DR-2 reflect the full unit areas which are then subject to various restrictions and preclusions due to slope, riparian reserves, etc. as described in the EA and EA addendums.*)

Except in instances where the May 15, 2002 EA Addendum #3 proposed changes which are accepted in this decision record (see above), all project design features and mitigating measures proposed in the EA and/or the October 15, 2001 EA Amendment will be implemented in accordance with the October 22, 2001 DR. Thus, where slopes specifications, riparian reserves protection measures, soil moisture limitations, special status species buffers or other conditions preclude or limit the use of the slashbuster machine, the fuel reduction treatments will be completed by hand methods consistent with the initial proposed action.

Units in Section 23 continue to have the highest priority for implementation as they are adjacent to rural residential areas and are within the wildland-urban interface (National Fire Plan).

Where girdling is prescribed in the EA for units that will now be treated with the slashbuster, girdling will be accomplished within the same season as the slashbuster work.

## III. RATIONALE

The rationale for this decision are summarized here. The rationale discussed in the October 22, 2001 Decision Record will not be restated here, even though many aspects of it are pertinent and related to the current decision as well.

As noted in the background statement above, the Free & Easy 2 timber sale was not sold. Thus the included commercial thinning and associated understory thinning and fuel hazard reduction work has not been completed. While the anticipated benefits of the overstory thinning will not be realized, there remains a great benefit for completing the proposed understory and fuel hazard reduction work. As noted in the earlier decision record, accomplishing this work with a slashbuster machine will result in appreciable cost savings in comparison with doing the work by hand with chainsaws followed with hand piling and pile burning.

The project design features and included mitigating measures impose extensive limitations on the use of the slashbuster machine thereby creating an acceptable balance between reducing the high cost of effectively treating heavy forest vegetation and resource protection. Acceptance of the

seasonal operating restriction change presented in EA addendum #3 is also based on balancing resource protection strategies, resource impacts and direct operational costs.

Accepting the buffering approach vs the seasonal operating constraint will allow some slash reduction work to be accomplished in the spring time. This will facilitate a more expeditious accomplishment of the fuel treatments and hazard reduction. It is recognized that it may result in a potentially greater direct impact on songbirds and nesting success, however, this impact will be relatively localized.

The decision is also based on meeting the National Fire Plan's goals for rural residential and resource protection through fuel hazard reduction.

As discussed in the earlier Decision Record, Alternative 1 (No Action Alternative) is rejected because it does not meet the objectives identified in the Medford District Resource Management Plan, the National Fire Plan or elements of the BLM's Strategic Plan. The No Action alternative would perpetuate and further contribute to undesirable fuel hazard conditions.

#### **IV. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION**

The changes to the proposed action have been designed and reviewed by the BLM's interdisciplinary team of resource specialists. They have concluded that the changes are not such that the level of resultant impacts will change sufficiently to require additional ESA consultation with the NMFS or the USFWS.

#### **V. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The October 2001 Decision Record summarized the public involvement efforts made during the preparation of the initial EA and project proposal. As noted above, the proposal to change the original manual fuel treatments to mechanical / slashbuster was made available for public review in October - November 2001. No comments on the addendum were received. In light of this and because of the limited changes in the action and the environmental consequences that will result from the proposals evaluated in EA Addendum #3, no additional public comment periods were provided.

#### **VI. CONCLUSION AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)**

Based on the information in the Free & Easy 2 Project EA, its addendums, the project record, and the absence of any letters received from the public about the proposed treatment changes and slashbuster use, I conclude that the decisions in this Decision Record are consistent with the Medford District Resource Management Plan, the Record of Decision and Standards and

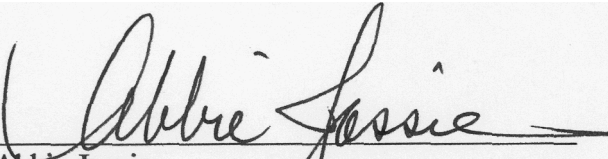
Guidelines on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and, the Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (January 2001). They are also consistent with the Endangered Species Act, The Native American Religious Freedom Act and cultural resource management laws and regulations.

On the basis of the information contained in the environmental assessment and its addendums and a consideration of the letters received from the public regarding the Free & Easy 2 Project, it is my determination that the decision stated above will not result in significant impacts to the quality of the human environment beyond the range of impacts and effects considered in the RMP and NFP EIS documents and that were accepted in their respective Records of Decision and to which the Free & Easy 2 EA is tied. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not warranted and will not be prepared.

## **VII. ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES**

This decision is a forest management decision. Administrative remedies are available to persons who believe that they will be adversely affected by this Decision. Administrative recourse is available in accordance with BLM regulations and must follow the procedures and requirements described in 43 CFR 5003 - Administrative Remedies.

In accordance with the BLM Forest Management Regulation 43 CFR 5003.2 (a&c), the effective date of this decision will be the date of publication of the Notice of Decision and FONSI in The Grants Pass Daily Courier. Publication of this notice establishes the date initiating the protest period provided for in accordance with 43 CFR 5003.3. While similar notices may be published in other newspapers, the date of publication in the Grants Pass Daily Courier will prevail as the effective date of this decision.

  
Abbie Jossie  
Field Manager, Grants Pass Resource Area  
Medford District, Bureau of Land Management

6-1-02  
Date

**Table DR2 - 1: Areas where the slashbuster machine will be used**

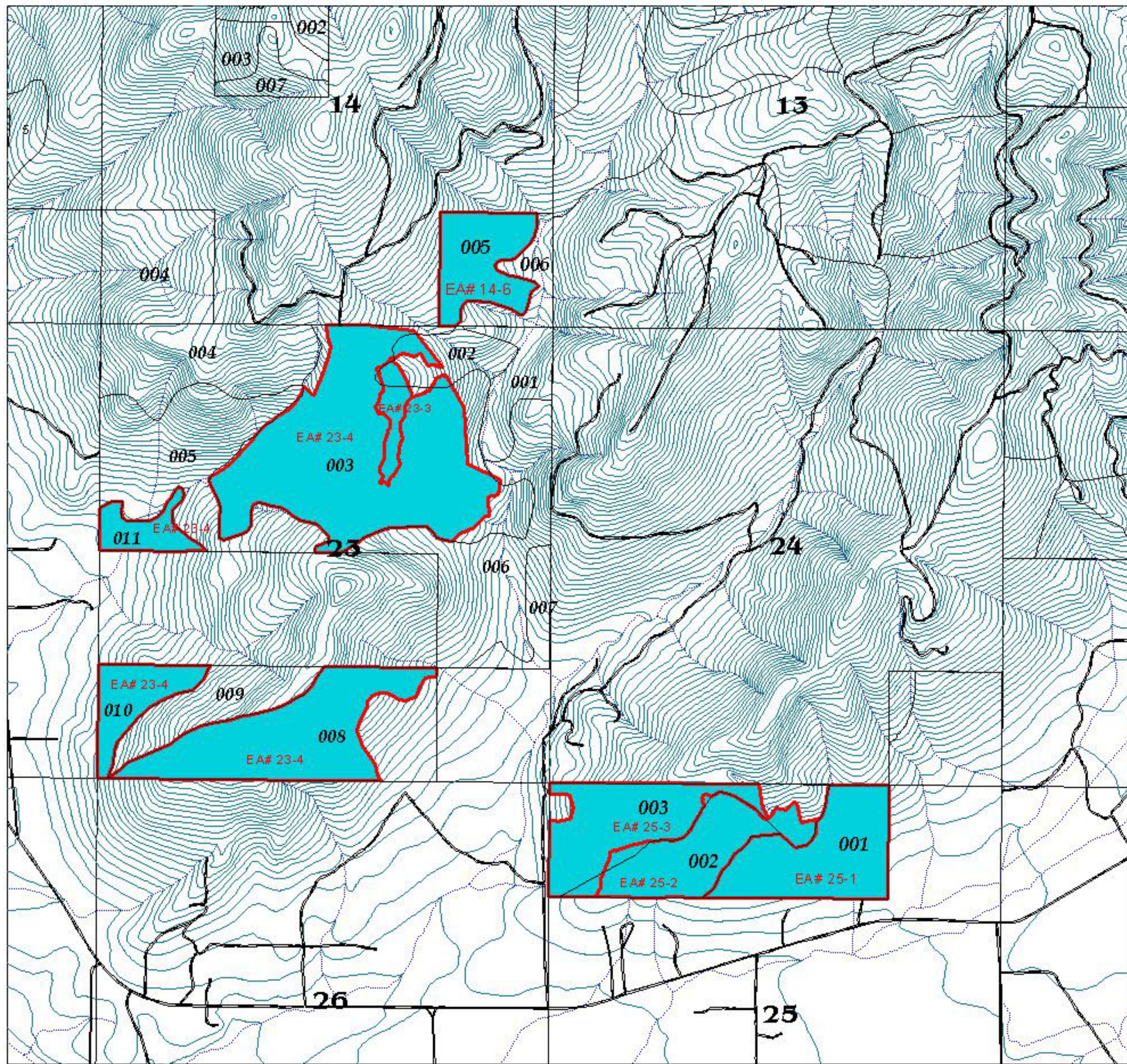
<u>EA Unit #</u>	<u>OI unit #</u>	<u>Approx. slashbuster acres **</u>	<u>Timber harvest Rx / Unit</u>	<u>Decision regarding slashbuster use</u>
<i>Section 11, T39S, R8W</i> - No slashbuster use proposed -				
<i>Section 14, 39S, R8W</i>				
14-6 (portion)	39-8-005 (portion)	15	No	<i>Serpentine Meadow restoration.</i> Implement slashbuster treatment proposed for SE1/4SE1/4 of section. Avoid RTV buffers which overlap into the unit.
<i>Section 15, T39S, R8W</i> - No slashbuster use proposed -				
<i>Section 17, T39S, R8W</i>				
17-3	39-8-17-002, 010	26	Yes	Implement slashbuster treatment within the designated boundaries of F&E 2 Timber Sale unit #17-3. Slashbuster work will <b>not</b> be conducted in the five acre manzanita harvest area unless harvest efforts has been completed. If the slashbuster is not used on these five acres, fuel work will be completed by hand as initially proposed.
<i>Section 23, T39S, R8W</i>				
23-2, 23-3	39-8-23-005	0	Yes	Slashbuster treatment proposed in addendum will <b>not</b> be implemented. RTV nests within the unit
23-3	003	7	Yes	Implement Slashbuster treatment within designated boundaries of F&E 2 timber sale unit #23-4A (tractor logging).
23-2, 23-3	009	0	Yes (Not in F&E2 TS)	Slashbuster treatment will <b>not</b> be implemented. RTV nests within unit.

23-4 (portion)	010 008 003 011	187	No	<i>Serpentine Meadow restoration.</i> Implement slashbuster treatment staying outside of RTV buffers which overlap into the unit. Avoid and protect botanical buffers.
23-6	006	0	No	Slashbuster treatment proposed in addendum will <b>not</b> be implemented. RTV nests within the unit
<b>Section 25, T39S, R8W</b>				
25-1	39-8-25-001	32	No	<i>Serpentine Meadow restoration</i> Implement slashbuster
25-2	39-8-25-002	22	No	<i>PCT / Brushing treatment</i> Implement slashbuster. Protect and avoid botanical buffers.
25-3	39-8-25-003 (portion)	32	Yes	Implement slashbuster treatment within the designated boundaries of F&E 2 timber sale unit #25-3.
<b>Section 33, T38S, R8W</b>				
33-1	38-8-33-001 (portion)	7	Yes	Implement slashbuster fuel hazard reduction within the designated boundaries of F&E 2 timber sale unit #33-1.
<b>Total</b>				
		<b>328</b>		

\*\* The indicated acreages are estimated net and exclude portions of the unit that are riparian reserve, excessive slope, or special status plant buffers.

6/6/02





Grants Pass Resource Area

BUM  
GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM

Free & Easy 2  
EA# OR110-00-15  
T39S-R8W  
Sec14, 23, 25  
Map DR-2



01 Units

Slashbuster Treatment Areas

0 500 1000 1500 2000 Feet

1" = 1600 Feet

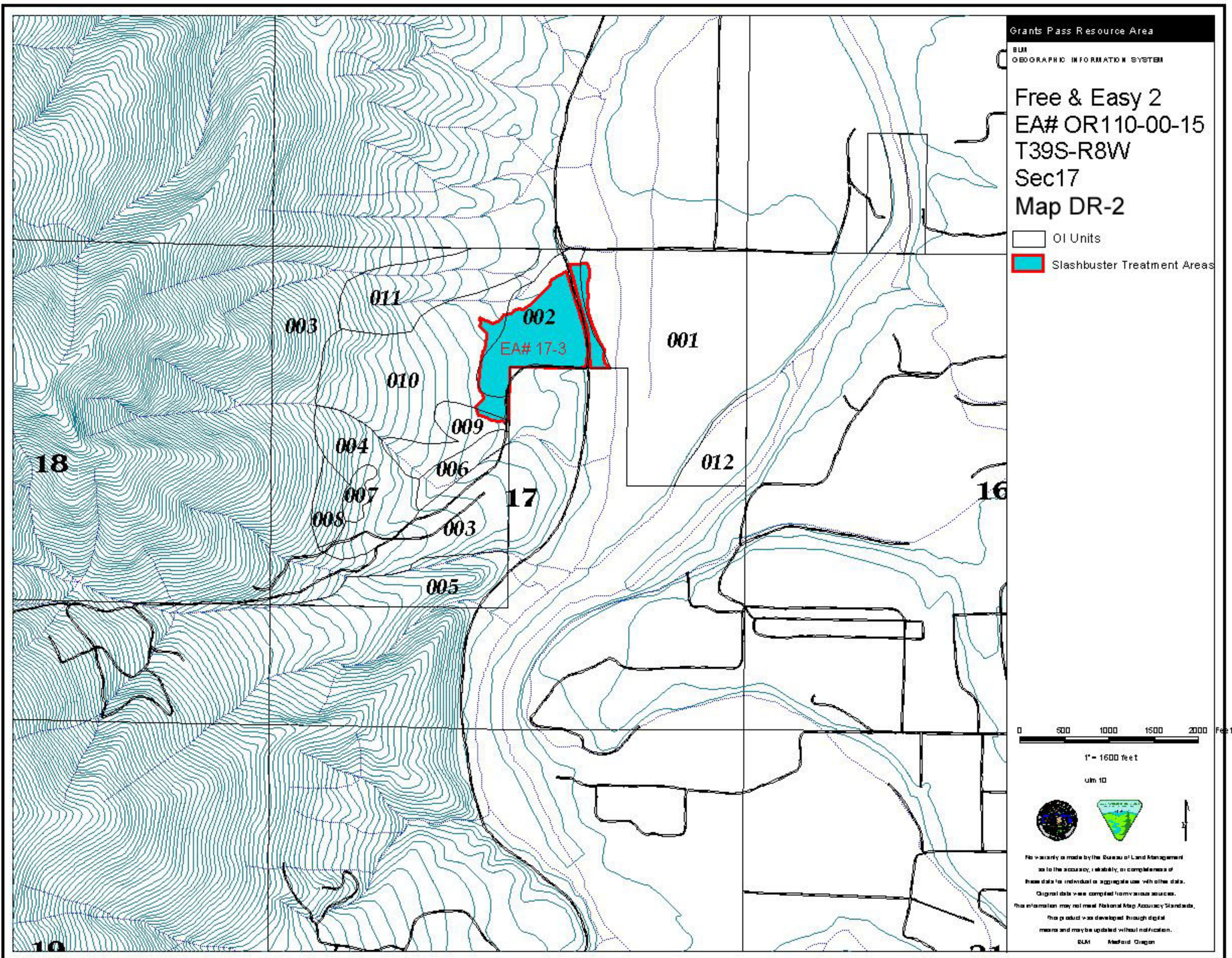
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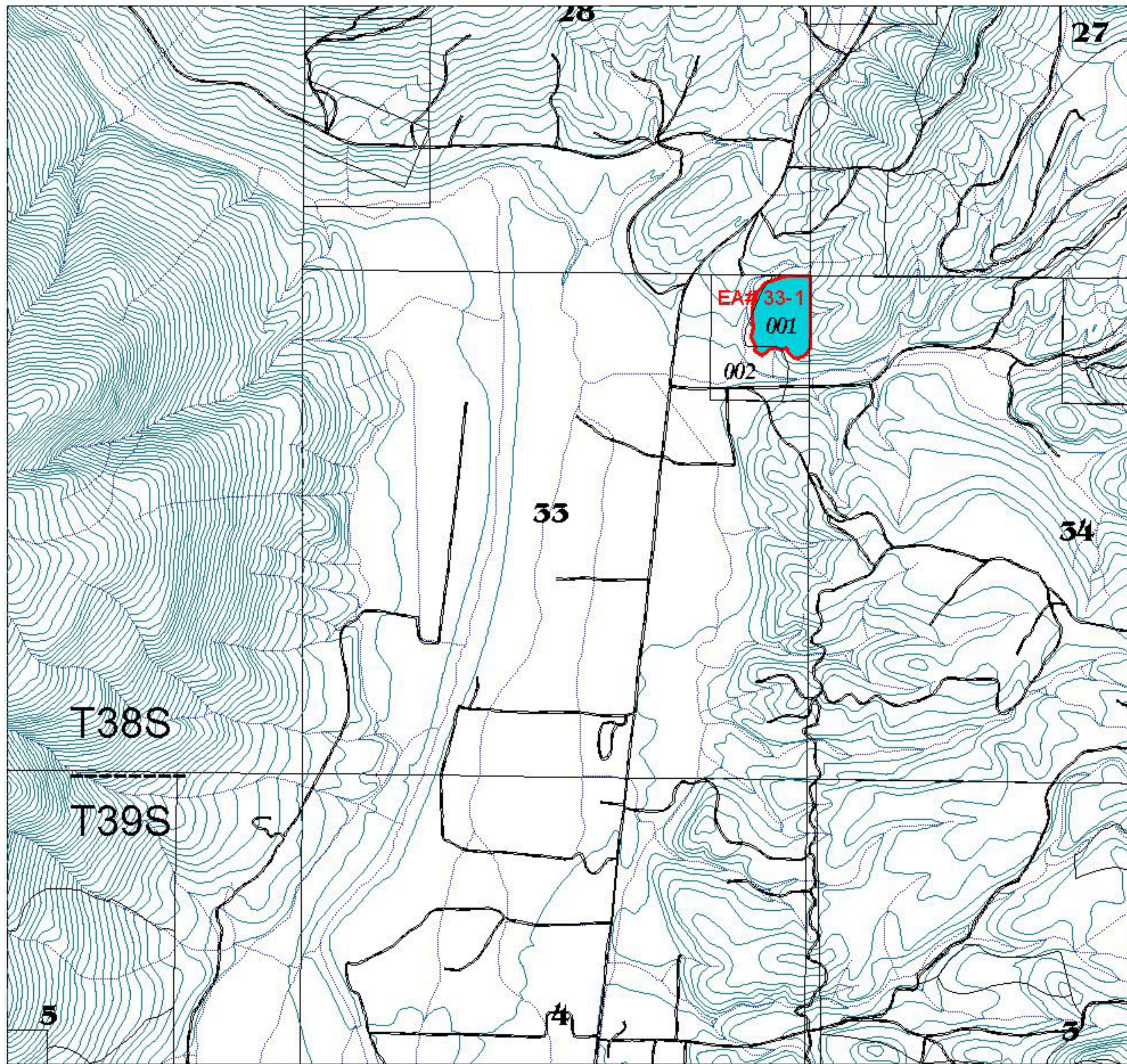
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Grants Pass Resource Area

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GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM

Free & Easy 2  
EA# OR110-00-15  
T38S-R8W  
Sec33  
Map DR-2

□ OI Units  
■ Slashbuster Treatment Areas

0 500 1000 1500 2000 Feet  
1" = 1600 Feet  
1:10

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